

## Claims

What is claimed is:

1           1. A method for communicating information between a first seller and  
2 buyers in a negotiating room associated with an on-line group-buying sale having a first  
3 featured item, comprising:

4           receiving the buyers in the negotiating room, wherein the negotiating room  
5 provides support for communications about the on-line group-buying sale among the  
6 buyers and the first seller;

7           receiving an initial price for the featured item from the first seller;

8           initiating the on-line group-buying sale for the first featured item after  
9 receiving the initial price from the first seller;

10           transmitting communications from the buyers to the first seller via the  
11 negotiating room, wherein at least some of the communications contain offers for the first  
12 featured item;

13           producing a first flash demand curve for the first featured item using the  
14 offers for the first featured item;

15           providing the first flash demand curve to the first seller; and

16           receiving a modified price for the first featured item from the first seller.

1           2. The method of claim 1 wherein the on-line group-buying sale has a  
2 second featured item associated with a second seller, the method further comprising:

3           receiving an initial price for the second featured item from the second  
4 seller;

5           initiating the on-line group-buying sale for the second featured item after  
6 receiving the initial price from the second seller;

7 transmitting communications from the buyers to the second seller via the  
8 negotiating room, wherein at least some of the communications contain offers for the  
9 second featured item;

10 producing a second flash demand curve for the second featured item using  
11 the offers for the second featured item and providing the second flash demand curve to  
12 the second seller; and

13 receiving a modified price for the second featured item from the second  
14 seller.

3. The method of claim 2, further comprising:

receiving a communication from a buyer of the buyers that contains an offer for the first featured item; and

receiving a communication from the same buyer that contains an offer for the second featured item.

4. The method of claim 3 wherein the first flash demand curve indicates that the buyer has also made an offer for the second featured item.

5. The method of claim 1, further comprising:

2 receiving an instruction from the first seller that modifies the featured item  
3 in the on-line group-buying sale to include at least one additional product/service.

3 transmitting a message to the buyers stating that subsequently received  
4 offers from the buyers will be treated as irrevocable; and

5 receiving further communications from the buyers, wherein at least some of  
6 the communications contain irrevocable offers.

1           7. The method of claim 1, further comprising:  
2           receiving an instruction from the first seller to close the on-line group-  
3           buying sale.

1           8. A method for determining demand for a featured item in an on-line  
2           group-buying sale, comprising:

3           receiving buyers into a negotiating room, wherein the negotiating room  
4           provides communication support between the buyers and a first seller of the featured  
5           item;

6           conducting a first on-line group-buying sale, wherein the first on-line  
7           group-buying sale is conducted in association with the buyers in the negotiating room;

8           producing at least one flash demand curve for the first featured item using  
9           offers received from the buyers of the first on-line group-buying sale;

10           providing the at least one flash demand curve to the first seller, wherein the  
11           first seller uses the at least one flash demand curve to create a sale demand curve for the  
12           featured item; and

13           conducting a second on-line group-buying sale of the featured item using  
14           the sale demand curve.

1           9. The method of claim 8, further comprising:

2           conducting a third on-line group-buying sale, wherein the third on-line  
3           group-buying sale is conducted in association with the buyers in the negotiating room;

4           producing at least another flash demand curve for the featured item using  
5           offers received from the buyers of the third on-line group-buying sale; and

6           providing the at least another flash demand curve to the first seller, wherein  
7           the first seller creates the sale demand curve for the featured item using the at least  
8           another flash demand curve.

1                   10. The method of claim 9 wherein the seller modifies the first featured  
2 item during the third on-line group-buying sale to include at least another  
3 product/service, the method further comprising:

4                   receiving from the seller an identification of products/services included in  
5 the first featured item for the second on-line group-buying sale before conducting the  
6 second on-line group-buying sale.

1                   11. The method of claim 8 wherein the second on-line group-buying sale  
2 begins before the first on-line group-buying sale using a current demand curve, the  
3 method further comprising:

4                   replacing the current demand curve for the featured item in the second on-  
5 line group-buying sale with the sale demand curve.

1                   12. The method of claim 8 wherein the first on-line group-buying sale  
2 includes a second seller and a second featured item, the method further comprising:

3                   providing at least one communication between the buyers and the second  
4 seller to the first seller.

1                   13. The method of claim 8, further comprising:

2                   storing the at least one flash demand curve in a data repository.

1                   14. A computer-implemented method for processing communications  
2 between buyers and sellers in an on-line group-buying sale for a featured item,  
3 comprising:

4                   receiving filtering instructions for communications relating to the featured  
5 item in the on-line group-buying sale;

6                   setting a message receiver to process buyer communications in accordance

7 with the filtering instructions;  
8 receiving buyer communications pertaining to the featured item during the  
9 on-line group-buying sale; and  
10 filtering the received buyer communications through the message receiver  
11 in accordance with the filtering instructions.

1 15. The method of claim 14 wherein the filtering instructions pertain to  
2 filtering the received buyer communications by at least one of a chat format, an  
3 auditorium chat format, and a threaded message format.

1 16. The method of claim 14 wherein the filtering instructions direct the  
2 message receiver to filter the received buyer communications according to a buyer format  
3 request associated with at least one of the received buyer communications.

1 17. The method of claim 16 wherein the buyer format request is one of a  
2 chat format, an auditorium chat format, and a threaded message format.

1 18. The method of claim 16, further comprising:  
2 determining if the buyer format request is available; and  
3 identifying another format if the buyer format request is not available.

1 19. The method of claim 14, further comprising:  
2 determining if multiple communications formats are available after  
3 receiving a buyer communication of the buyer communications; and  
4 selecting a communications format of the multiple communications formats  
5 for the received buyer communication using the filtering instructions if multiple  
6 communications treatments are available.

1           20. A computer-implemented method for allowing buyers and at least  
2 one seller to communicate about at least one featured item offered in an on-line group-  
3 buying sale, comprising:

4           receiving a buyer communication from a buyer of the buyers regarding the  
5 featured item;

6           transmitting the buyer communication to a seller representative associated  
7 with the featured item, wherein the seller representative comprises a utility that permits  
8 the at least one seller to communicate with the buyer;

9           receiving a response from the seller representative to the buyer  
10 communication; and

11           transmitting the response to the buyer.

1           21. The method of claim 20 wherein transmitting the buyer  
2 communication to the seller representative comprises translating the buyer  
3 communication from a first communications format to a second communications format.

1           22. The method of claim 20 wherein transmitting the response to the  
2 buyer comprises translating the response from a first communications format to a second  
3 communications format.

1           23. The method of claim 22 wherein the second communications format  
2 is one of a wireless communications format and a television communications format.

1           24. The method of claim 20, further comprising:

2           retaining at least a portion of the buyer communication in a data repository,  
3 wherein the data repository is configured to allow review of the communication portion  
4 by at least another buyer; and

5 retaining at least a portion of the seller representative's response in the data  
6 repository, wherein the data repository is configured to allow review of the  
7 communication portion by at least another buyer.

1 25. The method of claim 20, further comprising:  
2 transmitting instructions from the seller representative to an on-line group-  
3 buying mechanism hosting the on-line group-buying sale, wherein the instructions alter at  
4 least one characteristic of the featured item offered in the on-line group-buying sale.

1 26. A method for determining a flash demand curve for a featured item  
2 offered by a seller in an on-line group-buying sale, comprising:

3 receiving an initial price for the featured item from the seller;  
4 initiating the on-line group-buying sale for the featured item after receiving  
5 the initial price from the seller;  
6 receiving offers for the featured item from buyers, wherein the received  
7 offers include prices equal to or less than the initial price;  
8 constructing the flash demand curve; and  
9 providing the flash demand curve to the seller.

1 27. The method of claim 26, further comprising:

2 receiving a modified price for the first featured item from the seller after the  
3 flash demand curve has been provided to the seller;  
4 displaying the modified price to the buyers;  
5 receiving offers for the featured item from buyers, wherein the received  
6 offers include prices equal to or less than the modified price;  
7 constructing the new flash demand curve; and  
8 providing the new flash demand curve to the seller.

1           28. The method of claim 27, further comprising:  
2           receiving an instruction to determine a new flash demand curve;

1           29. The method of claim 26 wherein the flash demand curve is  
2 constructed by plotting received offers on a graph according to price and cumulative  
3 number of offers received at or below each price

1           30. The method of claim 26, further comprising:  
2           receiving an instruction to determine the flash demand curve after the  
3 initiation of the on-line group-buying sale.

1           31. A method for allowing buyers and at least one seller to communicate  
2 about at least one featured item offered in an on-line group-buying sale, comprising:

3           receiving a buyer communication regarding the featured item;  
4           transmitting the buyer communication to a seller representative associated  
5 with the featured item;

6           receiving a response from the seller representative to the buyer  
7 communication;

8           retaining at least a portion of the buyer communication in a data repository,  
9 wherein the data repository is configured to allow review of the communication portion  
10 by at least another buyer;

11           retaining at least a portion of the seller representative response in the data  
12 repository, wherein the data repository is configured to allow review of the  
13 communication portion by at least another buyer;

14           transmitting instructions from the seller representative to an on-line group-  
15 buying mechanism hosting the on-line group-buying sale, wherein the instructions alter a  
16 price of the featured item offered in the on-line group-buying sale.

1                           33. The method of claim 31 wherein transmitting the buyer  
2 communication comprises:

3 filtering the buyer communication using a message receiver.

1                           34. The method of claim 33 wherein the message receiver filters the  
2 buyer communication using at least one of a chat format, an auditorium chat format, a  
3 threaded message/newsgroup chat format, and a message board format.

1 35. The method of claim 33, further comprising:

2 identifying a message receiver format to apply in transmitting the buyer  
3 communication to the seller representative.

1                           36. The method of claim 35 wherein the identified message receiver  
2 format is at least one of a chat format, an auditorium chat format, a threaded  
3 message/newsgroup chat format, and a message board format.

1                   37. The method of claim 35 wherein the message receiver format  
2 comprises a seller-selected preference.

1                   38. The method of claim 37 wherein the seller-selected preferences  
2 comprise thresholds pertaining to application of a message receiver format from set of  
3 message receiver formats.

1                   39. The method of claim 31 wherein receiving a response from the seller  
2 representative comprises:

3                   examining the buyer communication to determine if an automated  
4 responder is suitable for replying to the buyer communication; and

5                   sending the buyer communication to the automated responder if  
6 examination of the buyer communication determines that the automated responder is  
7 suitable for replying to the buyer communication.

1                   40. The method of claim 31 wherein at least another featured item is  
2 offered in the on-line group-buying sale by at least another seller, the method further  
3 comprising:

4                   transmitting the buyer communication to the at least another seller  
5 representative.

1                   41. A computer-implemented negotiating room system for  
2 communicating information between sellers and buyers associated with an on-line group-  
3 buying sale having a featured item, comprising:

4                   a message receiver and transmitter, configured to receive buyer  
5 communications and send the buyer communications to the seller;

6                   a seller representative configured to assist the seller in reviewing and  
7 responding to buyer communications and further configured to send seller instructions to  
8 an on-line group-buying mechanism hosting the on-line group-buying sale; and

9                   an outgoing message transmitter configured to receive communications  
10 from the seller and transmit the communications to the buyers.

1                   42. The system of claim 41, further comprising:

2                   an automated responder configured to review the buyer communications

3 and provide a response to at least one buyer communication, wherein the outgoing  
4 message transmitter is further configured to send the response to at least one buyer.

1           43. The system of claim 41 wherein the message receiver and  
2 transmitter further comprises at least one of a chat enabler, an auditorium chat enabler, a  
3 threaded message/newsgroup enabler, and a message board enabler.

1           44. The system of claim 43, further comprising:  
2           a message receiver controller configured to send instructions to the message  
3 receiver and transmitter to enable the at least one of the chat enabler, the auditorium chat  
4 enabler, the threaded message/newsgroup enabler, and the message board enabler.

1           45. The system of claim 41, further comprising:  
2           a data repository configured to retain at least one seller response to a buyer  
3 communication.

1           46. The system of claim 41 wherein the seller representative is further  
2 configured to receive a modified price for the featured item from the seller and send the  
3 instruction to the on-line group-buying mechanism.

1           47. The system of claim 46 wherein the seller representative is further  
2 configured to receive an instruction from the seller to close the on-line group-buying sale.

1           48. The system of claim 46 wherein the seller representative is further  
2 configured to receive an instruction from the seller modifying the featured item in the on-  
3 line group-buying sale, wherein modifying the featured item comprises adding at least  
4 one of a product and a service to the featured item.

1           49. The system of claim 41 wherein the on-line group-buying sale has  
2 another featured item associated with another seller and wherein the message receiver  
3 and transmitter is further configured to receiver buyer communications for the another  
4 seller.

1           50. A system for determining demand for a featured item offered in an  
2 on-line group-buying sale by at least one seller, comprising:

3               an on-line group-buying mechanism configured to conduct the on-line  
4 group-buying sale for the featured item;

5               a message receiver and transmitter configured to receive buyer  
6 communications, wherein at least some of the buyer communications contain offers for  
7 the featured item;

8               a voting mechanism configured to receive the offers from the message  
9 receiver and transmitter and calculate a flash demand curve using the offers; and

10               an operator representative configured to provide the flash demand curve to  
11 the at least one seller.

1           51. The system of claim 50, further comprising:

2               an outgoing message transmitter configured to send a message to at least  
3 one buyer announcing the beginning of the on-line group-buying sale.

1           52. The system of claim 51 wherein the outgoing message transmitter is  
2 configured to send the message over at least one of a wireless communications format  
3 and a television communications format.

1           53. The system of claim 50 wherein the message receiver and  
2 transmitter is configured to process buyer communications using at least one of a chat

3 format, an auditorium chat format, a threaded message/newsgroup format, and a message  
4 board format.

1 54. The system of claim 50, further comprising:  
2 an operator representative configured to announce the initiation of an  
3 auditorium chat forum to the buyers over an electronic network.

1 55. The system of claim 53, wherein the electronic network is at least  
2 one of a cable network, the Internet, and the public switched telephone network.

1 56. A system for selling featured items offered by a seller to buyers,  
2 comprising:

3 a negotiating room configured to sell the featured items using an on-line  
4 group-buying sale, wherein the negotiating room includes a voting mechanism  
5 configured to calculate at least one flash demand curve for the featured items using offers  
6 received from the buyers; and

7 an on-line group-buying mechanism configured to sell the featured items  
8 using a sale demand curve developed from the at least one flash demand curve.

1 57. The system of claim 56 wherein the negotiating room further  
2 comprises:

3 a message receiver and transmitter configured to receive buyer  
4 communications, wherein at least some of the buyer communications contain offers for  
5 the featured items.

1               58. The system of claim 56 wherein the on-line group-buying  
2 mechanism begins selling the featured items using an initial demand curve before the on-  
3 line group-buying sale in the negotiating room begins, the system further comprising:  
4               a seller representative configured to send an instruction to the on-line  
5 group-buying mechanism to replace the initial demand curve with the sale demand curve.

1               59. A system for filtering communications during negotiations between  
2 buyers and a seller in an on-line group-buying sale for a featured item, comprising:  
3               a message receiver controller configured to receive instructions from the  
4 seller, wherein the instructions pertain to setting a message receiver and transmitter to  
5 process buyer communications;  
6               a message receiver and transmitter configured to receive buyer  
7 communications pertaining to the featured item during the on-line group-buying sale; and  
8               a seller representative configured to assist the seller in process received  
9 buyer communications.

1               60. The system of claim 59 wherein the message receiver and  
2 transmitter is configured to process received buyer communications by at least one of a  
3 chat format, an auditorium chat format, and a threaded message format.

1               61. The system of claim 59 wherein the message receiver and  
2 transmitter is configured to process the received buyer communications according to a  
3 buyer format request associated with at least one of the received buyer communications.

1               62. The system of claim 61 wherein the buyer format request is one of a  
2 chat format, an auditorium chat format, and a threaded message format.

1               63. The system of claim 61 wherein the message receiver and

2 transmitter is further configured to determine if the buyer format request is available and  
3 to identify another format if the buyer format request is not available.

1 64. The system of claim 59 wherein the message receiver controller is  
2 further configured to determine if multiple communications formats are available and to  
3 select a communications format of the multiple communications formats for the received  
4 buyer communication using filtering instructions if multiple communications formats are  
5 available.

1 65. The system of claim 59 wherein the message receiver transmitter is  
2 further configured to filter the buyer communication according a seller-selected  
3 preference and wherein the seller-selected preferences comprise thresholds pertaining to  
4 application of a message treatment format from set of message treatment formats.

1 66. A data processing system that provides communications between  
2 buyers and a first seller during an on-line group-buying sale for a first featured item, the  
3 data processing system including negotiating room software executable on the data  
4 processing system and configured to transmit communications from the buyers to the first  
5 seller, wherein at least some of the communications contain offers for the first featured  
6 item, the data processing system further configured to produce a first flash demand curve  
7 for the first featured item using the offers for the first featured item and configured to  
8 provide the first flash demand curve to the first seller.

1 67. The data processing system of claim 66 wherein the on-line group-  
2 buying sale has a second featured item associated with a second seller, the data  
3 processing system further configured to transmit communications from the buyers to the  
4 second seller, wherein at least some of the communications contain offers for the second  
5 featured item; the data processing system further configured to produce a second flash  
6 demand curve for the second featured item using the offers for the second featured item

7 and configured to provide the second flash demand curve to the second seller.

1           68. The data processing system of claim 66 wherein the data processing  
2 system is further configured to receive a modified price for the first featured item from  
3 the first seller.

1           69. The data processing system of claim 66 wherein the data processing  
2 system is further configured to receive an instruction from the first seller that modifies  
3 the first featured item in the on-line group-buying sale to include at least one additional  
4 product/service.

1           70. A data processing system that determines demand for a featured item  
2 during an on-line group-buying sale, the data processing system including negotiating  
3 room software executable on the data processing system and configured to initiate a first  
4 on-line group-buying sale, wherein the first on-line group-buying sale is conducted in  
5 association with buyers and a seller, the data processing system further configured to  
6 produce at least one flash demand curve for the featured item using offers received from  
7 the buyers of the first on-line group-buying sale, configured to provide the at least one  
8 flash demand curve to the seller, wherein the seller uses the at least one flash demand  
9 curve to create a sale demand curve for the featured item, and configured to initiate a  
10 second on-line group-buying sale of the featured item using the sale demand curve.

1           71. A computer-readable data transmission medium containing a data  
2 structure comprising:

- 3           (a) a first portion that specifies a featured item in an on-line group-  
4 buying sale;
- 5           (b) a second portion that specifies a communication about the featured  
6 item;

1                           72. A computer-readable medium having computer-executable  
2 instructions for performing a process for allowing buyers and at least one seller to  
3 communicate about a featured item offered in an on-line group-buying mechanism,  
4 comprising:

receiving a buyer communication from a buyer of the buyers regarding the featured item;

transmitting the buyer communication to a seller representative associated with the featured item, wherein the seller representative comprises a utility that permits the at least one seller to communicate to the buyer;

receiving a response from the seller representative to the buyer communication; and

transmitting the response to the buyer.

1                   73. The computer-readable medium of claim 72 wherein transmitting the  
2 buyer communication to the seller representative comprises translating the buyer  
3 communication from a first communication format to a second communication format.

1                   74. The computer-readable medium of claim 72 wherein transmitting the  
2 response to the buyer comprises translating the response from a first communication  
3 format to a second communication format.

1           75. The computer-readable medium of claim 72, further comprising:  
2           retaining at least a portion of the buyer communication in a data repository,  
3           wherein the data repository is configured to allow review of the portion of the buyer  
4           communication by at least another buyer; and

5 retaining at least a portion of the seller representative response in the data  
6 repository, wherein the data repository is configured to permit review of the portion of  
7 the seller communication by at least another buyer.

1                   76. The computer-readable medium of claim 72, further comprising:  
2                   transmitting instructions from the seller representative to an on-line group-  
3                   buying mechanism hosting the on-line group-buying sale, wherein the instructions alter at  
4                   least one characteristic of the featured item offering in the on-line group-buying sale.

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